DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 868 FL 024 554

AUTHOR Ihde, Thomas W.
TITLE Teaching Irish to Americans: Focus on Feedback.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 10p.; For serial publication in which this article appears, see FL 024 547.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT TEANGA: The Irish Yearbook of Applied Linguistics; v15 p81-89 1995
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Editing; *Error Correction; *Feedback; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Irish; Language Research; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages; Self Esteem; *Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Writing Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *United States

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes of American students learning Irish as a second language about error correction. Subjects were 45 former students in summer programs in an Irish university, who were asked how they preferred to have their papers corrected by Irish language teachers. Most (64 percent) preferred full editing on essays, finding it the most educational and the most supportive of motivation and confidence. A smaller proportion (18 percent) preferred circling of errors, and 16 percent chose the use of symbols. One subject (2 percent) preferred a summary of errors. Those reporting their own proficiency level as low tended to prefer editing; those reporting a high proficiency level claimed in equal proportions to prefer circling, symbols, and editing. the conclusion is drawn that, in general, students of Irish want full correction of their work. However, the above-mentioned forms can be time-consuming for teachers and have not been proven to be more effective than other, less time-consuming approaches. Teachers are encouraged to provide their students with opportunities to experience forms of correction other than full editing, and to experience success not in grammatical perfection but in successful communication. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 407 868

Teaching Irish to Americans: Focus on Feedback

Thomas W. Ihde
Montclair State University/Trinity College
Dublin

There is little agreement among researchers as to what form of corrective feedback teachers should employ to respond to student errors in second language writing. Teachers continue to use a variety of methods including more direct forms which are quite time consuming. In this paper I will attempt to show that preference for varying forms does not only exist on the part of researchers and instructors, but also with the students themselves. Teachers are sometimes pressured by students to provide forms of corrective feedback on compositions that they would not otherwise use. Students, as this paper will show, prefer forms of feedback that research has not proven to be more affective.

FEEDBACK FORMS

Before looking at the research in this area and my own findings, it is necessary to define the various feedback forms to which this paper will be referring. There are many different approaches and both teachers and peer critiques can be found using one approach on a rough draft and another on a second draft. For our purposes here we will only be analyzing teacher feedback and will take into consideration only pure forms of the following approaches. *Editing*, as I prefer to call it, can be viewed as a method in which the teacher writes in the corrections leaving the student little to do except recopy the corrections. *Symbols* can be defined as errors highlighted or circled and a code marked in the margin defining the type of error. *Circling* can be portrayed as just highlighting or circling the error. The student in this case would be provided with no information concerning the type of error. Lastly,

FL024554

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Jeffrey Kallen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

summary can be defined as comments at the end of an essay in which the reader responds to the message of the writer.
Editing is the most direct of feedback forms. It is often used with the understanding that the student would not be able to otherwise correct the errors. One of the difficulties with editing is that the teacher often misunderstands the meaning of the message and by correcting, distorts the student's expressed point of view.

Symbols and *circling* can be described as more indirect forms of feedback. They provide students with clues as to their errors. Instructors often use this approach hoping that students will develop skills to find and correct their own errors in the future. Symbols can also provide students with the opportunity to identify what types of errors commonly appear in their writing. However, students often lose the interpretive key for the symbols and many symbols are extremely vague. Lastly with the use of both symbols and circling, there appears to be a problem with responding to errors beyond the word or sentence level. The idea of circling an entire paragraph seems futile.

Summary comments may be one way of dealing with this problem. While such comments do not provide the location of errors in the text, they can comment on difficulties that involve a major portion of an essay. Also more frequent reoccurring errors at the word or sentence level can be discussed. Using this approach, the scorer can respond to the message of the writer taking full advantage of the communicative act.

RESEARCH INTO FEEDBACK FORMS

Research into these four approaches as well as other forms of feedback have not produced conclusive findings. Researchers such as Page (1958), Lalande (1982), and even Semke (1984) have claimed in their publications that certain approaches may affect students' learning more positively or more negatively than other approaches. Yet other researchers such as Stiff (1967), Hendrickson (1981), and Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) published findings that showed no significance between correction approaches. I designed my own experiment with the participation of 72 ESL and linguistics students at Montclair State University in 1993, in which L1 and L2 students of English were

exposed to three forms of correction. No significance was found between treatments (Ihde 1993).

Two researchers, Brandl (1991) and DeKeyser (1993), have attempted to approach this question from a different viewpoint. Seeing that research has not been able to offer conclusive results on the feedback question, they have attempted to discover if separate treatments affect learners of varying achievement levels differently. Brandl did this by monitoring students' use of help functions while using a computer language program. High achievers, he found, made more frequent use of functions which would enable them to discover the answer themselves. This could be interpreted to mean that less direct forms of corrective feedback should be provided for high-achieving composition students.

DeKeyser, who focused on the oral aspect of language learning, hypothesized that students with high scores on the grammar pretest would improve with error correction and those with low scores on the grammar pretest would perform better without such corrections (1993; 505). Marginal significance was found for the written post-test, however this was not the case for the oral post-test. It seems in DeKeyser's study that extrinsic motivation and anxiety may have played a greater role than that of achievement levels.

RELATED RESEARCH

While carrying out a long-term experiment designed to incorporate questions raised by other researchers, I felt it would be valuable to survey both instructors and students as to their preference regarding feedback forms. While the second part of this paper will focus primarily on student preference, it is interesting to note the findings for a similar survey of teacher preference. During the summer of 1993, 49 ESL/EFL teachers responded to a questionnaire inquiring as to their correction practices. Twenty-eight of the respondents were French instructors of English following a summer course at Trinity College Dublin. The remaining twenty-two informants were American ESL instructors contacted through the Internet list TESL-L.

Results from this survey showed that while the majority of French instructors made use of symbols, the majority of American ESL teachers did not prefer any one approach. Thirty-eight percent of the American sample claimed to make use of circling, thirty-three percent maintained that they used symbols, and twenty-four and five percent claimed to use editing and summary techniques respectively. Very few Americans used summary comments and no French informants claimed use of this technique. Since process writing (White & Arndt 1991) seems to be gaining popularity in language learning classrooms, I also inquired as to use of rewrites. Seventy-eight percent of the French instructors answered that they did make use of them where as all of the American sample replied, "Yes" (Ihde [forthcoming]).

STUDENT PREFERENCES

First let us consider research in this specific area. Cathcart and Olsen 1976 found that ESL students wanted corrections to be made. Although their study involved oral language learning, their findings show that little has changed in the past twenty years. Many of their informants went as far as asking for every error to be corrected in oral production.

In 1991, Leki published results of research involving ESL students who were focusing on their writing skills. When questioning 100 ESL students at the University of Tennessee, she found that these students felt that 'good' writing was error-free writing. Due to this the informants wanted and expected all of their errors to be corrected. She suggested that many of the students may have expected all errors to be corrected due to their language learning experiences in their native country.

QUESTIONNAIRES

I decided to put the same questions I asked of the instructors and referred to earlier to second language learners. Due to my involvement with learners of the Irish language in the past (see Ihde 1994) I decided to question American learners of Irish on the topic of student preference. I did this in order to answer the following question: Would Americans learning a foreign language respond similarly as did Leki's ESL students in stating that they preferred more direct forms of feedback?

To carry out the research, University College Galway provided me with the names and addresses of 123 Americans who studied Irish in Galway for the past six summers. I tried to contact these learners by mail. Thirty-six of the letters were returned by the postal service, one addressee was deceased, and another did not answer the first question. The eighty-five remaining letters were understood to have arrived in the hands of Irish language learners. Of this 85, 45 were answered representing 53% of the sample.

FINDINGS

Students were asked to indicate how they would prefer to have their papers corrected by Irish language teachers. No informant claimed not to want any corrections. One participant or 2% chose summary, 18% circling, and 16% symbols. A total of 64% claimed they would prefer full editing on their essays.

Students supported their choice of full editing by making comments about teaching approaches, study habits, and the nature of a correct form. In general, respondents felt this was the most educational of approaches. Some felt it maximized learning by exposing students to correct forms of the target language. Some pointed out that students cannot always find the correct form even if the type and location of error are indicated. Others claimed that motivation and confidence are increased through use of full editing.

Regarding studying habits, some students claimed that due to the distance and infrequent contact with teachers, it was not always possible to have corrections checked by an instructor. If the correct form had been noted by the teacher the first time, corrections could be studied at a later date. In this case students claimed they would compare correct forms with their erroneous usage. Also, some felt that by having teachers provide full corrections, students could make better use of their language studying time.

Lastly, some students made general comments on the nature of correct forms. Several students felt they provided immediate and clear feedback. The corrections provided examples of proper usage in

context. And lastly, one student stated that since the use of a correct form was her 'goal', teachers should provide it without hesitation.

The smaller group of students who preferred symbols felt that they needed a clue as to the place and type, but that by correcting the error themselves benefits could follow. Most claimed they learned more by correcting their own errors. The process of correcting, some claimed, would help them avoid making the mistake again. Some felt it would lead to better understanding of why they were making these errors. Another student felt increased motivation when provided with the opportunity to correct her own errors.

Students who preferred circling gave many of the same answers as those who chose symbols. However one difference was placed on the use of grammar books and dictionaries. Those who chose circling felt that they would be better able to use such resources in the future to solve grammar difficulties. Lastly the one student who chose summary comments emphasized the importance of communicating her message to the teacher.

PROFICIENCY LEVELS

In addition to expressing preference for feedback forms, students were also asked to evaluate their proficiency level. In trying to discern if those with low levels of proficiency would prefer more direct forms of correction and those with high levels of proficiency would prefer more indirect forms of correction, I attempted to discover an indication of correlation. For those who described their oral ability as being able to speak and understand a few words, more than half chose editing. While those who claimed to be able to speak and understand most or all of what goes on in Irish claimed in equal proportions to prefer circling, symbols, and editing. Yet since these two groups represented the marginal extremes of the entire sample, a larger sampling would be needed to see if the trend remains.

Discussion

As with the Cathcart and Olsen's (1976) study and the Leki (1991) survey of ESL students, the above survey of Irish language students shows that the majority of students prefer full editing when teachers

correct their papers. The fact that such preference was stated for editing demonstrates a certain understanding of the learning process in general. Be it in mathematics, science, history, or language, many American students were educated in an era when there was only one right answer and that the teacher knew this answer.

Although many classrooms continue to function in this way, there has been an increasing understanding for higher order thinking skills. In some classrooms, teachers are encouraging students to engage in metacognitive exercises. It would seem that error corrective forms such as circling and symbols would encourage such activities. As some of the students commented on their questionnaires, figuring out why an error is an error may enable students to recognize what is happening when they speak and write. This in turn may aid students to develop strategies to overcome such difficulties in future writing samples (see Braungart-Bloom 1986).

CONCLUSION

It can be clearly seen that most learners of Irish as a foreign language want their instructors to fully correct all errors in their work. With this information we need to remember that such corrections are time-consuming for teachers and have not been proven to be any more effective than other less time-consuming approaches.

The question that many instructors of composition are left with is how to convey these findings to students without giving them the impression that the instructor is looking for an excuse to not do something he or she dislikes. Must teachers continue to make full corrections to justify their employment, to motivate their students, or to meet their students' expectations regardless of language learning findings? The answer to this question is "no".

Instructors need to provide their students with opportunities to experience other forms of corrections. This in itself may change expectations in the future. Motivational factors can also be readdressed so that success is experienced not in grammar perfection but in successful communication.

REFERENCES

Braungart-Bloom, D.S. (1986). *Assessing Higher Order Thinking Skills through Writing*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ERIC, ED 270 476.

Brandl, K.K. (1991). *Strategic Response to Errors in Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin.

Cathcart, R.L. and J.E.W.B. Olsen. (1976). Teachers' and Students' Preferences for Correction of Classroom Conversation Errors. *On TESOL'76*, (eds) J.F. Fanselow and R.H. Crymes, 41-53. Washington, DC: TESOL.

DeKeyser, R.M. (1993). The Effects of Error Correction on L2 Grammar Knowledge and Oral Proficiency. *Modern Language Journal* 77(4), 501- 514.

Hendrickson, J.M. (1981). Error Analysis and Error Correction in Language Teaching (*Occasional Papers 10*). Singapore: SEAMEO.

Ihde, T.W. (1993). Error Correction in L1 and L2 Language Learning. *Rule Syntactica* 4, 46-53.

----- (ed.) (1994). *The Irish Language in the United States: A historical, sociolinguistic, and applied linguistic survey*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

----- [forthcoming]. *Feedback in L2 Writing*. Washington, DC: Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics. ERIC.

Lalande, J. (1982). Reducing composition errors: An experiment. *Modern Language Journal* 66, 140-149.

Leki, I. (1991). The Preferences of ESL Students for Error Correction in College-Level Writing Classes. *Foreign Language Annals* 24(3), 203-218.

Page, E.B. (1958). Teacher Comments and Student Performance: A seventy-four classroom experiment in school motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 49, 173-181.

Robb, T., Ross, S. and Shortreed, I. (1986). Salience of Feedback on Error and its Effect on EFL Writing Quality. *TESOL Quarterly* 20(1), 83-93.

Semke, H.D. (1984). Effects of the Red Pen. *Foreign Language Annals* 17, 195-202.

Stiff, R. (1967). The effect upon student composition of particular correction techniques. *Research in the Teaching of English* 1, 54-75.

White, R. and Arndt V. (1991). *Process Writing*. New York: Longman.